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Our Rights
and
Our Limitations



Mrs. Rose Harrington



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Be truthful :
Speak the truth with honor and discretion.

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ROSE HARRINGTON

Our right is: To be right and to do right, and to be as agreeable as possible in the being and the doing.



① This is recommended as a supplementary Reader—to be read through, early in the school year, and again just before closing for the summer vacation.

Each pupil should own his copy, that he may have it for reference.







NATURAL RIGHTS

I

PERSONAL SAFETY

THERE are certain rights which every child has when he is born. These are called the natural rights of man, meaning all human beings.

The first and most dearly prized of these is the safety of the person, and our laws are made especially to guard it.

In its defense man is ready, if necessary, and may, make any exertion at any cost, and he is protected in so doing by the laws

common to all nations, which are our common laws.

The savage impulse known as "the law of the strongest" is given up by civilized human beings for the sake of mutual protection.

The strong one says to the weak one: I might hurt you or make you a slave, but the day may come when I shall be weak, or some stronger one may appear; so—that we may all be safe and all be protected—I will promise not to hurt you, the one stronger than I will not hurt me, and should you find one weaker than yourself you would not hurt him.

In civilized communities all should feel that they are safe.





II

THE RIGHTS OF PROPERTY

The second natural law is that which protects the property and gives to every human being the right to a domicile, to a home.

Next to the person, in the estimation of every human being, beginning with the child, are the things which are his own. The law protects even a child's right to these.

Every child has a right to a home, to care, to sustenance, to clothing, to all ordinary privileges from his parents, including education, until he is twenty-one years of age.

On his part he gives his love and obedience and filial duty.

No one has a right to touch or interfere with the persons or property of minor children—that is, children of less than twenty-one years—unless the parents are clearly not fit to be guardians, when the law intervenes. At the age of twenty-one years they are men and women.

After the age of twenty-one years, if the child wishes it and the parents are affectionate, the family home is still his until he makes one for himself, and is always regarded as a refuge, but it is a matter of mutual liking and agreement. A child might wish to go and parents might be unloving, but this is not expected or provided for.

A child may hold property under the guardianship of his parents, who are expected to look upon his interests as equal to and dearer than their own.

When a child has no home or parents, the State offers to provide sustenance, clothing, shelter, and education until an age which differs in different states, but which must be until he is able to support himself.

Every person, then, has a right to his own earnings and property and to an education under the protection of the law.

In this case also the strong one says to the weak one: I might reach out and take your things or your money, but also a stronger one might take mine.

This would be wrong in both cases, but it is called the savage law of the strongest.

Now, that I may be protected from one stronger than I, and that you may be protected from me, and one still younger or weaker from you, we will all promise and agree to guard our own rights and to respect the rights of others.

This is right, and such an agreement is, as

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in the case of the safety of the person, the basis of common law.

Every child should be encouraged to keep his books, his playthings, his toys, all his small belongings in good condition.

They should be his own until he himself is ready to give them away.

A child who is not allowed to have and to hold his own possessions is not likely to become a good citizen. With the possession of property comes dignity and a sense of responsibility which should be encouraged.

Every person has also a right to all the innocent pleasure and amusements, to all the prosperity and happiness, that he can have honestly and with due regard for the rights of others.



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III

LIMITATIONS

In order that we may each be protected in our personal and property rights, we accept certain limitations.

There is absolute right and absolute wrong; these no one can mistake.

All others are matters of opinion—of individual opinion when relating only to one's self, of public opinion when relating to the general good,—and each one, even a child, has a right to his own opinion, but he must not express it offensively. It may be expressed,

but not insisted upon, as something which others must accept, because they also have a right to their opinions.

“ There is a right
Which no one can mistake.
There is a wrong
Never to be done.
The conscience delicate and true
Leads right, not wrong,
Leads me, leads you.”

There are rules or laws which govern the conduct of pupils in school. These are made for the general good of the school, as well as for the good of each person in it.

There are laws which govern society—that is, the association of people together. These also are for the general good, and are made on the basis of public opinion.

There are laws which govern the nation ; laws which govern the state ; laws which govern the

county; laws which govern each city and town and village.

All these laws are for the general good, and they are administered by officers chosen by the people to be governed, and whose rights and property are to be protected.





IV

PENALTIES

In accepting the laws, which are practically the laws of all nations, we agree that they are good, and that a penalty for violating them is just.

In agreeing to this we are not thinking of ourselves as even possible criminals,—and this is right. The agreement is made for the safety of the individual and for the general good.

When we break the law, if we should be so unfortunate, we must submit, therefore, to the penalty, but we are expected to inform

ourselves of the principal ones — these are six or eight in number, and may be called fundamental laws,—and we are never to break them.

A careful regard for the rights of others, which does not mean meddling, neither does it mean sacrificing one's own rights, is the safeguard of society and the State.

The penalties provided by the common laws are the same in all countries as regards that greatest of all crimes, namely, cruel murder. This is one of the unpardonable crimes.

The law of every civilized country reads: Thou shalt not kill.

There is only one excuse which could make it right, and that is self-defense, or defense of the person when life is endangered by an attack upon it.

In some cases the penalty is life imprisonment, but that is only when there might be a mistake in the evidence. The usual penalty is *death*. This is because the criminal who has

committed such a crime cannot be trusted to live among human beings; he is not a safe habitant of the earth, and we have a right to be safe.

Other punishments are given for other offenses. These are for purposes of reform and also to prevent others from committing that crime.

- Punishments should, therefore, not be too severe, nor so public as to prevent a return to business if reform is possible. Neither should punishments be too light for the purpose of preventing a recurrence of the crime.

Another law reads: Thou shalt not steal.

The first offense of stealing is usually the result of not knowing the rights of others, and also of not knowing the law and the penalty of breaking it. Forgiveness for the first offense under such circumstances, even for grown persons, should be the rule.

But if this were the case, the stolen articles

should be returned and apologies made, and the guilty person should be made acquainted with the law, and the penalty for any future offense.

The penalty is a term of imprisonment, varying with the crime.

It should always be remembered that dishonesty and hunger are two different things.

A man or a child might, rather than starve, reach out to take that which would keep him from starving,—and be right in doing it.

However, in civilized countries, where kindness is supposed to prevail, if a man or woman or child is hungry, he has only to ask to receive.

House-breaking is a distinct offense against the law. The penalty is a fine or imprisonment, or both.

We provide ourselves with homes that we and our personal property may be safe from interference.

That in our absence our homes may not be entered or our property injured, we provide ourselves with locks and keys; and no person outside the family or household can have a key to the house, and that home or that family be safe.

Arson is setting fire to buildings, and is not a common offense. It means gross ignorance on the part of the offender, or that he is a hardened criminal.

The penalty is confinement in the state's prison, and the term of imprisonment, if it is the crime of a hardened criminal, would be long, because the criminal is not a safe inhabitant of any place where human beings live.

Forgery is a rare crime. It consists in imitating the signature of another, or writing the name of another, so that it passes; this applies especially to business papers.

The penalty is severe, the maximum being thirty years in the state's prison.

The penalty is so severe, because it is impossible to transact business with any success unless the signature is sacred.

This offense might be committed through ignorance, but otherwise it can scarcely be conceived of,—and is always wrong.

Perjury is making false statements, and taking the oath as prescribed by law that such statements are true.

The punishment is thirty days in jail.

Taking or opening the letters of another is a distinct offense against the law. Detaining letters is not permitted. All the machinery of the United States postal service is employed to hasten the delivery of letters to those to whom they are addressed, and any delay which can be prevented is an offense for which the offender may be punished.

This (stealing letters) has been a rare offense; the more because it has been considered a dishonor to have even a curiosity concerning the

private affairs of others, except in the family.

Robbing the mails is, if discovered, punished by fine or imprisonment.

Cruelty. The punishments for cruelty vary, but there is one for every phase of it; and it is never to be tolerated in any guise.

In addition to the legal punishments, cruelty spoils the nature, and shortens the life of the offender. In its worst forms it constitutes the unpardonable sin.

The small punishments of the school-room are not supposed to be corporal—that is, inflicted upon the person.

They are not so much punishments for the small offenses against discipline, as for the purpose of preventing their recurrence in the interest of good order, and end generally in forgiveness.

The teacher should have few rules, and these need not have fixed penalties, but should be dealt with according to circumstances. Also,

all rules should be absolutely known to the pupils. The information, given at the same time, that these rules are made for the general good and not to curtail personal liberty or happiness, tends to good discipline.





V

THE NECESSITIES OF LIVING

The necessities of life are water, food, clothing, and shelter from the elements. Next to these are a few things which every child must learn, whether he lives at home with his parents or guardians, or whether he is brought up by the State. These are reading and writing, number and arithmetic, geography and maps and globes, and history.

Reading and writing must be learned as a matter of course as the foundation for all learning from books.

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